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ABSTRACT

The numerous types of individuals classified as part-time faculty are discussed, along with arguments for and against using part-time faculty, and their rights and status. A very diverse set of individuals with widely varying interests works part-time. The purposes for which they are employed vary widely as do the rules under which they work. Changing lifestyles and work attitudes demand flexible employment options. Civil service reforms recently passed or currently pending acknowledge changing attitudes toward work, and a "Federal Employees Part-Time Career Employment Act of 1978" requires federal agency heads and the Civil Service Commission to work toward increasing use of career part-time positions. Among the many advantages of having part-time faculty are that the contributions of young intellectuals are not lost because of the current Ph.D. surplus, people with family responsibilities can be accommodated, and retirement can be phased in. The arguments against using part-timers include the fact that they are an inexpensive source of labor, and established faculty and their unions view this as a serious threat to their own economic security. Some other concerns that are discussed are accreditation and teaching quality. Rights to employment security, equal compensation, and access to full-time faculty bargaining units are concerns of part-time faculty. A bibliography is included. (SW)

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CURRENT PERSPECTIVES ON PART-TIME FACULTY*

By David W. Leslie

Part-time faculty are responsible for a substantial portion of the total instructional output in the nation's colleges and universities; yet they remain essentially uncounted, unobserved, and uninvolved in the academic enterprise. Three major studies[1] are currently in progress, the results of which should make a substantial difference in how much is known about the characteristics, attitudes, productivity, and rights of part-timers.

Aggregate Data on Part-Time Faculty

It is an oversimplification to discuss part-time faculty in the aggregate. Many types of part-time positions are used to handle the academic and related work of colleges and universities.

Their functions may vary across departments. An English department may staff its large service course sections with part-timers, a computer science department may staff its advanced specializations with them, and social work may base its field instruction on part-time clinical faculty who supervise interns. The logic of each department's reliance on part-timers may thus be unique, and will depend on current full-time staffing patterns as well as both national and local labor market conditions.

Further, there are numerous types of individuals working as part-time faculty. Tuckman (1978) breaks a national sample of over 3,700 part-timers surveyed in the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) study into seven identifiable groups including semiretired persons, students, persons seeking full-time work but settling for part-time work, persons working at two or more part-time jobs, persons who have full-time positions and are moonlighting, persons whose work opportunities are restricted by home and family responsibilities, and others (a small fraction) whose motives are unknown. They vary as well in personal characteristics such as preparation, experience, educational philosophy, and age (Kellams and Kyre 1978). The picture of wide variance is reinforced when the population is described by type of institution and by discipline. About one-third of all faculty in postsecondary institutions are part-time (Leslie 1978b). Over one-half (55.8 percent) of all community college faculty are part-time (Leslie 1978b). But research universities typically seem to employ much lower levels of part-time faculty. The norm in this sector is 15 to 20 percent. Other institutional strata (regional universities, liberal arts colleges) appear to fall between these extremes (National Science Foundation 1977). Variation is wide within strata, especially among community colleges.

Trends in part-time faculty employment are difficult to establish because significant limits exist on data gathered by the National Center for Educational Statistics, the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission, and the National Science Foundation.[2] Frankel and Harrison (1977) project short-term growth in employment of part-timers, but they also project a decline in numbers by 1985. National Science Foundation (1977) figures show that in scientific fields the proportion of part-timers at *universities* began to decline several years ago and continues to do so. On the other hand, community colleges show a strong and persistently upward trend in use of part-timers. A substantial correlation between the level of part-time faculty and the level of part-time students suggests that where colleges deal with large numbers of clients who seek not degrees but individual courses, development of particular skills rather than general education, and are willing to invest only short time periods in educational activities, there will be a tendency to rely more heavily on part-time faculty (Leslie, 1978b). Conversely, programs that involve more continuity of instruction and more investment of time by both students and faculty can be expected to rely more heavily on full-time faculty.

In any case, existing data confirm that institutions are moving in both directions on use of part-timers. National trends may obscure more meaningful developments at the micro-level where research is needed.[3]

Arguments For and Against Using Part-Time Faculty.

Prominent among arguments for increasing use of part-time work arrangements are suggestions that the American life-style and corresponding attitudes toward work are changing. The general thrust of this thesis is that individuals pursuing satisfying work arrangements are prepared to accept more modest incomes, are more willing to share

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available work with others, and seek more flexibility in on-the-job conditions. Part-time work, job-sharing, and "flexi-time" all represent employers' responses to the changing preferences of the labor force ("Hearings . . . ," 1977).

Civil service reforms recently passed or currently pending acknowledge such changes in attitude toward work, and are designed to accommodate them. The "Federal Employees Part-Time Career Employment Act of 1978," contained the following rationale in support of provisions requiring federal agency heads and the Civil Service Commission to work toward increasing use of career part-time positions:

> (1) Many individuals in our society possess great productive potential which goes unused because they cannot meet the requirements of a standard workweek; and
>
> (2) Part-time permanent employment –
> (a) provides older individuals with a gradual transition into retirement;
> (b) provides employment opportunities to handicapped individuals or others who require a reduced workweek;
> (c) provides parents opportunities to balance family responsibilities with the need for additional income;
> (d) benefits students who must finance their own education and training;
> (e) benefits the Government, as an employer, by increasing productivity and job satisfaction, while lowering turnover rates and absenteeism, offering management more flexibility in meeting work requirements, and filling shortages in various occupations; and
> (f) benefits society by offering a needed alternative for those individuals who require or prefer shorter hours (despite the reduced income), thus increasing jobs available to reduce unemployment while retaining the skills of individuals who have training and experience ("Federal . . . ," 1978).

Wisconsin's legislature, relying on similar reasoning, passed a civil service reform bill in 1977 that contained several parallel provisions ("Wisconsin . . . ", 1977).

Strikingly similar arguments favoring use of part-time faculty in higher education have been offered. Blackburn (1978) pointed out the implications of the current Ph.D. surplus (see also Trivett 1977) for academic placement positions. Warning that disciplinary research may thus be cut off from a potential source of creative thought, and that lack of access to academic positions may be truncating the next generation's contributions to intellectual advancement, he advocated making room for part time appointments as a way of keeping young intellectuals in the disciplinary pipelines.

The Carnegie Council (1975) recognized the value of part-time positions in accommodating persons with family responsibilities, and recommended that promotion and tenure opportunities be opened to part-timers. In part, its reasoning was based on an earlier Carnegie Commission (1973) report that distinguished between part-timers with full-time professional commitments elsewhere and those who could commit their undivided professional attention and energy to academic work, except for family responsibilities that necessitated at least a temporary reduction in load. The American Association of University Professors had, still earlier, adopted a position advocating what are now often called "full-status" part-time positions "with reduced loads and salaries but with full perquisites" to accommodate both men and women with academic career aspirations that might otherwise be thwarted by competing family responsibilities ("Senior . . . ," 1971).

One very real problem being addressed is the persistently marginal status of women in the academic world. Tobias and Rumbarger (1974) pointed out the difficulty women experience as they try to fit into the normal (male) cycle of an academic career. Their recommended solution is to reconceive the idea of academic careers in order to accommodate a variety of lifestyle choices, a prime alternative being the option for part-time work. Tobias' work at Wesleyan University (1975) to clarify differing classes of part-time appointments – including that of "occasional part-time leave" for persons needing temporary reductions in load – is well-known.

That women respond well to the availability of part-time work is clear. Morgenstern and Hamovitch (1976) report less absenteeism due to family responsibilities, more continuity of employment, and more responsiveness to wage increases among women working part-time than among women working full-time. But Leslie (1978b) has cautioned that an increasingly qualified female labor force with changing family roles cannot be fully absorbed to the level of their interests and commitments by making part-time positions available. Women's frustrations with academic employment patterns may continue unless they can attain equitable access to full-time positions.

Other arguments for employing part-time faculty address a variety of issues. Baratz suggested the phased-in retirement via stepped-down work loads and the shared husband-wife appointment as alternative means of spreading the available work to accommodate junior faculty in a tight market. Koltai (1977) points out the essential need for flexibility in the community college and the role of part-timers in meeting it:

> If community colleges are to maintain their reason for being, they must be able to change to suit the community that supports them . . . they require an advanced degree of flexibility . . . we have retained such flexibility via the utilization of part-time instructors (p. 11).

Maher and Ebben (1978) see reliance on part-timers as a crucial "survival strategy" for financially strapped private colleges, providing the basis for developing more attractive programs at low cost (pp. 74-75). Ernst and McFarlane (1978) discuss the important instructional advantages of professional experience, personal maturity, and community and professional involvement the part-timer often brings to the classroom. (On this point, we have found no generalizable research results that establish part-timers as more or less effective then full-timers.)

Arguments against using part-timers are complex. The National Education Association (1976) recently labelled use of part-timers "a major problem for full-time faculty in higher education" (p. 105). The NEA report noted that part-timers can be used to exclude career professionals from available positions, and that part-timers' ability to work outside the framework of collective bargaining units

and professional certification processes makes them "a corps of unregulated personnel" that can be exploited "by unscrupulous administrators and boards of trustees" (p. 103) The NEA argues that nonunion labor will work for lower wages, thus undercutting gains made by the union for its members. It argues for raising part-time wages to prorated full-time equivalent rates, and for employing a single full-time instructor whenever part-timers' assignments can feasibly be combined (p. 108). The American Federation of Teachers has condemned use of part-time faculty in very similar terms (Magarrell 1977).

In brief, the faculty labor surplus and the economic difficulties of many colleges make part-timers a cheap and attractive source of labor, but established faculty and their unions view this as a serious threat to their own economic security.

There is unquestionably a basis for assuming that part-timers constitute an inexpensive source of labor. Tuckman's (1978) careful exploration of differential compensation for part- and full-time faculty shows an advantage to full-timers, although it is not a precisely determined one. Lombardi's (1973) earlier analysis resulted in an estimate that part-timers teaching a course typically cost between one-half and four-fifths what it would cost to use a full-timer. But Lombardi (1976) more recently pointed out that part-time wages in community colleges are increasing relative to full-time wages, and that legislative pressure—at least in California—is pushing toward prorated pay. Fryer (1977) confirms the current trends toward increasing economic and security benefits for individuals working part-time in California community colleges. Political pressures expressed through legislationand collective bargaining may be expected to narrow the economic differences between employing part- and full-time faculty.

Accrediting bodies look with skepticism on programs that rely too heavily on part-timers. Informal interpretation of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools guideline indicates that a threshold of concern is reached when 25 percent or more of a college's course sections are taught by part-timers.

The concern expressed, of course, represents an interest in the quality of instruction. Ernst and McFarlane (1978) pointed out the serious problems associated with heavy reliance on part-timers. Among other things, they cannot be easily oriented to college policies or socialized to common practice. They are normally out of touch with full-time faculty, making coordination of instruction difficult. High turnover may affect instructional continuity and coordination. Lack of continued involvement in college affairs may reduce their commitment to common goals and methods. Thus, the institution must be concerned about an unsupervised, unevaluated, migratory, and invisible work force with minimal experience and commitment.

Rights and Status

Head (1978) has identified three contested issues establishing property rights to employment, the right to equal compensation, and access to full-time faculty bargaining units.

To claim property rights to employment (and thus to establish some measure of security against presumptive nonrenewal of one's contract) an individual "must . . . have a legitimate claim of entitlement to it" (Board of Regents v. Roth, 1972, p. 577). Short-term contracts, however, are the norm for part-time faculty. Tuckman (1978) reports that "only 5 percent have employment agreements lasting longer than one academic year" (p. 74). The legal issue is whether part-timers can establish property rights to continued employment in spite of their short-term contracts. In California, a community college was required to grant prorated tenure to a part-timer who had established sufficient continuity of service to qualify under that state's law (Balen . . . , 1978). Responding to this decision, the California legislature has prohibited tenure slots to part-timers serving at less than 60 percent of a full-time load (Head 1978).

These actions reflect common disagreement about the proper grounds for employment security. Courts and labor boards have not established a clear preference for continuity of service or level of service as the ruling factor in adjudicating part-timers' claims (compare Los Rios . . . , 1977; and Federation . . . , 1977). At present, no general claim of entitlement seems to exist.

Head (1978) points out the well-established and legally meaningful differences between part- and full-time work that have been used as evidence to effectively thwart part-timers' drive for some measure of equal pay. While faculty unions and sympathetic legislatures can be expected to push for "equal pay for equal work" (Lombardi 1975), neither the Fair Labor Standards Act nor the Equal Proection clause of the 14th amendment is currently interpreted as requiring it (Head 1978).

The status of part-time faculty vis-a-vis collective bargaining units is ambiguous. The National Labor Relations Board, which has jurisdiction over private college labor relations, has ruled (a) that part-timers should be included in the full-time faculty bargaining unit, and (b) that they should be excluded from it. (New York University 1973). It currently assumes, unless proven otherwise, that part-timers should not be permitted to join the full-time bargaining unit. State labor boards have ruled differently, favoring the inclusion of at least some part-timers (Federation . . . , 1977; Los Rios . . . , 1977; University of Massachusetts 1976).

Ikenberry (1978) has pointed out, however, that part-timers have made only very limited gains in the wider movement toward faculty bargaining. Only about 38 percent of the contracts in force on June 30, 1977, covered at least some part-timers. Of those, about three quarters "place some limiting definition on the kinds of part-time faculty members eligible for membership in the bargaining unit" (p. 57). Even where some part-timers have gained access to the full-time unit, the results of negotiations are not always to their advantage: . . . inclusion of part-time faculty members in the unit does not in any manner imply benefits or other provisions identical to those available to full-time faculty members (Ikenberry 1978, pp. 114-115).

The part-timer is typically denied access to tenure, given lesser security than full-timers in the event of retrenchment, and denied access to full benefits. But prorated pay and prorated access to some benefits have been negotiated with modest frequency (Ikenberry 1978, pp. 117-119).

Conclusion

A very diverse set of individuals with widely varying interests works part-time. The purposes for which they are employed vary widely as do the rules under which they work.

Changing lifestyles and work attitudes demand flexible employment options. Institutional economics, including the need for programming flexibility, make reliance on a pool of part-time faculty essential for adaptation to the changing environment in which colleges now operate. And reduced professional mobility threatens intellectual progress unless imaginative restructuring of career tracks can effectively engage the new generation of doctoral graduates in pure intellectual work.

A creative and supportive policy environment is needed if part-time faculty are to find their working conditions attractive. Evidence reviewed here suggests that policy initiatives should draw carefully rationalized distinctions among various types of part-time faculty and among various types of part-time work. Individualized terms of employment may be essential to the development of fair practice. Many institutions will find part-timers to be an indispensable part of their work force in a constraining and uncertain future. Attention to their interests, morale, and professional development will be essential to a productive relationship.

Footnotes

[1]Agencies conducting these studies are the American Association of University Professors, the Center for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Virginia, and the College and University Personnel Association.

[2]The NCES does not routinely gather data on part-timers; the EEOC does not conduct annual surveys; and the NSF does not cover all fields. It is not clear, either, that definitions of "part-time faculty" are consistent from one survey to another.

[3]The University of Virginia project will soon complete a series of institutional case studies designed in part to assess departmental and institutional logic in using (or avoiding use of) part-time faculty.

[4]See Grymes (1977) for a review of available studies.

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